

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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TAGS: EAIR, FR, UK, US

SUBJ: CIVAIR: FRENCH PRESS REACTION TO COLEMAN

HEARING ON CONCORDE

1. CONCORDE HAS BEEN A MAJOR STORY AND EDITORIAL TOPIC IN THE FRENCH MEDIA FOR MORE THAN A WEEK, FOCUSING ON JANUARY 5 HEARING IN WASHINGTON. PRESIDENT GISCARD'S STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD FLY TO THE US IN INCORDE IN MAY FURTHER FANNED INTEREST THIS QUESTION.

2. WHILE MANY NEWSPAPERS CHOSE TO CHARACTERIZE THE HEARINGS AS A "TRIAL" IN WHICH SECRETARY COLEMAN WAS SITTING AS JUDGE AND JURY, MUCH OF THE COVERAGE WAS SURPRISINGLY OBJECTIVE, I.E., REVEALED THAT CONCORDE ALSO HAS ITS DEFENDERS IN THE US AND THAT SECRETARY COLEMAN'S EVEN-HANDED CONDUCT OF PROCEEDINGS INDICATED THE US WAS MAKING A SINCERE EFFORT TO BE FAIR. ONE RADIO COMMENTATOR, IN WINDING UP HIS REMARKS ON CONCORDE, SAID THAT HOWEVER MUCH THE FRENCH MIGHT DEPLORE OBSTACLES CONCORDE HAD ENCOUNTERED IN THE US, JAN. 5 HEARING IN WASHINGTON
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HAD BEEN AN IMPRESSIVE EXAMPLE OF "REAL DEMOCRACY AT WORK".

3. THERE WAS NONETHELESS A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF COVERAGE IMPLYING OR STATING OUTRIGHT THAT "SO-CALLED" ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE A SMOKE-SCREEN FOR PROTECTIONISM BY THE US AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND AIRLINES. RADIO AND TV COMMENTATORS HAVE ALSO SPECULATED THAT US HOSTILITY TOWARD CONCORDE COULD CONCEAL PLANS TO PRODUCE A SECOND GENERATION AMERICAN SST, POSSIBLY IN COOPERATION WITH FRANCE AND THE UK. SOME OF THIS COVERAGE WAS RATHER BITTER, MAKING SUCH POINTS AS THAT THE US HAD NOT CARED MUCH FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN CONDUCTING THE WAR IN VIETNAM, ETC. JEAN LEFEVRE, REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON ON TV2, NOTED THAT HUNDREDS OF US-BUILT PLANES WERE OPERATED INTO FRANCE BY THE WORLD'S AIRLINES, WHICH, TAKEN TOGETHER, MADE MUCH MORE POLLUTION THAN CONCORDE, AND THAT THE FRENCH HAD NEVER COMPLAINED ABOUT THIS.

4. ONE SURE THING IS THAT VIRTUALLY ALL ELEMENTS OF THE FRENCH MEDIA EXPRESS THEMSELVES STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF LANDING RIGHTS, WITH L'HUMANITE EVEN CLAIMING THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE "THE BEST DEFENDERS OF CONCORDE".

5. PRESS REPORTS THAT FOLLOWING JANUARY 5 HEARING GOF REPS WHO ATTENDED WERE GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT SECRETARY COLEMAN'S DECISION WILL BE FAVORABLE, AT LEAST FOR DULLES, BUT WILL PERHAPS BE ACCOMPANIED BY CERTAIN CONDITIONS SUCH AS LANDING RIGHTS FOR ONLY A SIX OR TWELVE MONTH PROBATIONARY PERIOD. RADIO AND TV COMMENTATORS HAVE ALSO SPECULATED FREELY ON THAT LIKELIHOOD. PRESS RECOGNIZES THAT ACCESS TO JFK WILL STILL PROVE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN, AND IN TELEPHONE INTERVIEW FROM WASHINGTON BROADCAST OVER FRENCH RADIO CLAUDE ABRAHAM, WHO HEADED FRENCH DEL TO JANUARY 5 HEARINGS, WAS GLOOMY OVER PROSPECTS FOR OBTAINING LANDING RIGHTS AT JFK. HE ALSO WARNED OF POSSIBLE DANGER STILL LYING AHEAD IN THE US COURTS OR IN CONGRESS.

6. THERE HAS BEEN SOME CRITICISM IN PRESS AND FROM
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TRADE UNIONS THAT GOF MAY HAVE SENT TOO LOW LEVEL A DELEGATION TO WASHINGTON HEARING, I.E., SENIOR CIVIL SERVANT (ABRAHAM) WHEREAS UK SENT A JUNIOR MINISTER. (COMMENT: THIS COULD HELP EXPLAIN PRESIDENT GISCARD'S REMARK TO PRESS JANUARY 5 THAT GOF HAD NOT WANTED TO "POLITICIZE" THE ISSUE.)

7. ON THE WHOLE, MEDIA COVERAGE HAS DESPITE ITS

VOLUME BEEN MORE RESTRAINED AND BALANCED THAN WE
WOULD HAVE EXPECTED. STILL, THE NET EFFECT HAS
PROBABLY BEEN TO CONVINCE MOST OF THE FRENCH
PUBLIC THAT WHEN ALL THE TECHNICAL COMPLEXITIES
ARE SET ASIDE, THE DECISION THE USG WILL TAKE ON
CONCORDE IS REALLY A POLITICAL ONE THAT WILL PUT
FRANCO-AMERICAN AMITY TO THE TEST.
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